

NORTH AMERICA

The Historical Geography
of a Changing Continent

Edited by
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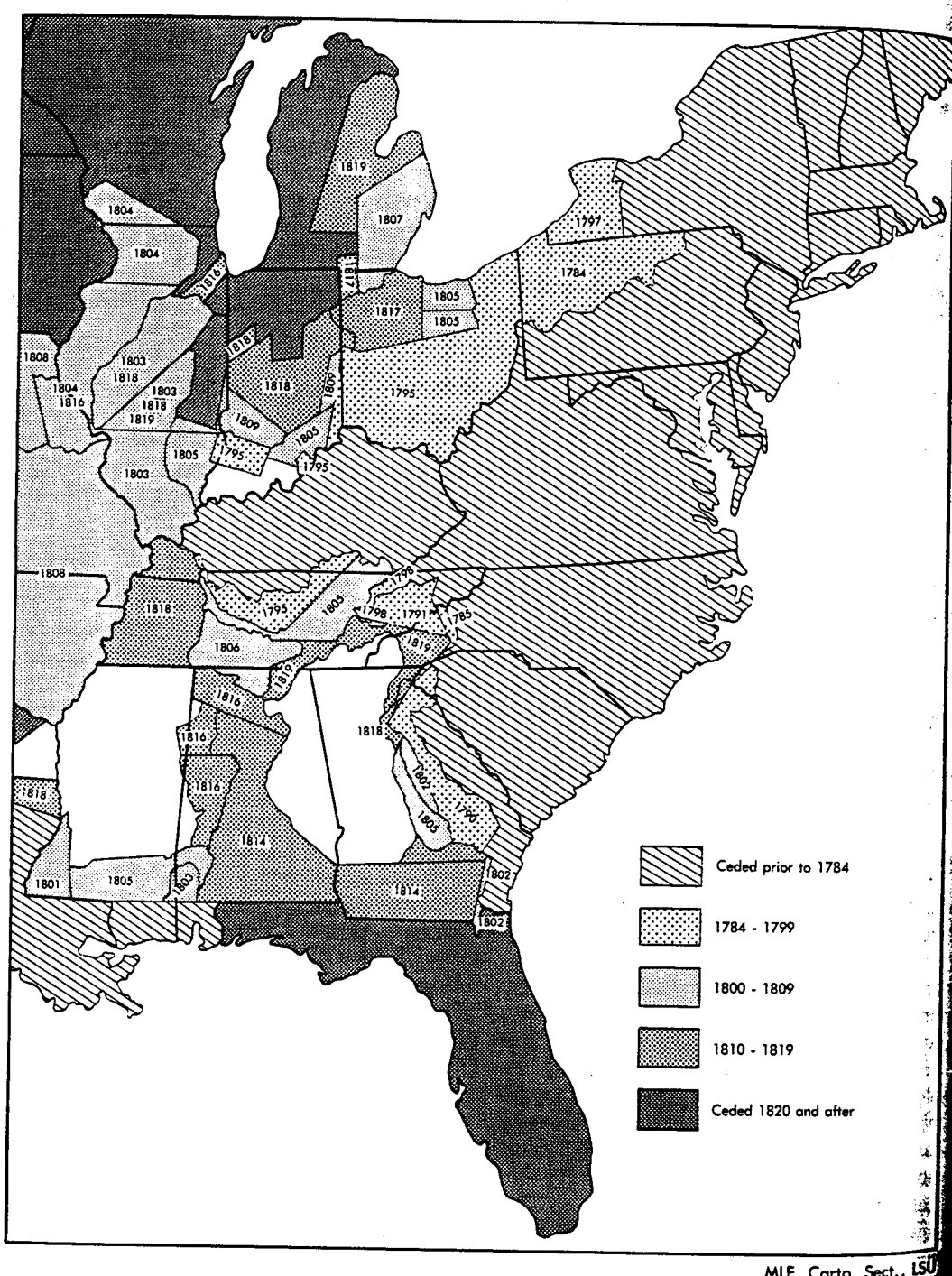


Figure 7.7 Indian Land Cessions, 1784-1819

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The fate of Indians was varied, as were called "Indian problems" much less common. Most eastern whites for a century were actively engaged in commerce. Those in the West kept cattle and hog slaves. Many simple, burgeoning population moved to reservations. The Native Americans' use were void. A number of treaties of reservations that were abolished. Indians was taken. It eventuated in the "that originally included later became Kansas. The remnants of a nation finally be moved after removal is a sorry, smaller and smaller the object of derision. The time that removed from white settlement recapture their former peace, but few would still would live trans another story.

A GROWING POPULATION

At the close of the Revolution, the population lay in a broad swath from New Hampshire to Georgia. Population concentrated in southern and mid-Atlantic area; settled area widened. The Plains and the Piedmont of Georgia. Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and occupied areas. Even

The fate of Indians occupying these lands was varied, as were the attitudes toward the so-called "Indian problem." Outright warfare was much less common than is popularly supposed. Most eastern tribes had been in contact with whites for a century or more, and many were actively engaged in agriculture and commerce. Those in the Southwest grew cotton and kept cattle and hogs; some even owned black slaves. Many simply became assimilated in the burgeoning population, while others were moved to reservations. Proposals to relocate the Native Americans to areas set aside only for their use were voiced from time to time. A number of treaties called for the establishment of reservations that were never surveyed; others were abolished before any action to relocate Indians was taken. The reservation movement eventuated in the "permanent Indian Reserve" that originally included virtually all of what later became Kansas and Oklahoma, to which the remnants of a number of tribes would eventually be moved after 1835. The story of Indian removal is a sorry one, indeed. Forced onto smaller and smaller plots of land, they became the object of derision and pity. It was argued at the time that removal to some place distant from white settlements would permit them to recapture their former ways of life and live in peace, but few would make the trip and fewer still would live tranquil lives. But that is part of another story.

A GROWING AND EXPANDING POPULATION

At the close of the Revolution the bulk of America's population lay east of the Appalachians in a broad swath from the Merrimack River in New Hampshire to the Savannah River in Georgia. Population was densest and most concentrated in southern New England and the mid-Atlantic area; south of the Potomac, the settled area widened to include all the Coastal Plains and the Piedmont and extended into Georgia. Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Delaware may be said to have been settled effectively, but most of New Hampshire, Maine (still a part of Massachusetts), New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia still had sparsely occupied areas. Even Maryland and South Car-

olina had some western lands yet available for settlement. By the time of the first federal census in 1790, the new nation could boast a population of nearly 4 million, of which slightly over 100,000 lived west of the mountains. In the 30 years following the first census, states were added to the union and population more than doubled, to 9.6 million. More important, a radical shift westward had occurred, with more than 2 million inhabitants, nearly a quarter of the nation's total, being counted west of the Appalachians (Table 7.1).

By 1790 more than 100,000 settlers already occupied Kentucky and Tennessee west of the Appalachians. Major western population clusters were to be found in western Pennsylvania, the Bluegrass Basin of central Kentucky, and along the Cumberland River in central Tennessee. The frontier had expanded northward in New England to include southern Maine and most of central New Hampshire and Vermont. The Watauga-Holston settlements in east Tennessee had grown enough to declare themselves the short-lived independent state of Franklin, challenging the authority of North Carolina and hoping for admission as a new state by a sympathetic Congress.

However impressive the movement across the mountains following the French and Indian War had been, it was but a trickle compared with the flood that followed in the 1790s. The conclusion of Jay's Treaty in 1794 removing British claims from the Old Northwest, the Treaty of San Lorenzo in 1795 that ceded Spanish claim to the Yazoo Strip, and the Treaty of Greenville with the Ohio Indians in the same year cleared the way for massive migrations into the interior of the continent. Interrupted only briefly again during the War of 1812, the tide of people swept over the land until initial occupancy had been completed.

The westward movement was not simply a giant wave of population that surged over the mountains from the East. It changed pace as political, economic, and frontier conditions dictated, sometimes grinding to a halt for a time only to surge again when opportunity beckoned. It was selective in both the routes chosen and the land taken up. The migration was keenly sensitive to topography, perceived land values, land availability, and Indian presence. It was intimately associated with so many variable conditions that the story cannot be told

Table 7.1 Populations of the States, 1790-1820

State	1790	1800	1810	1820
Maine	96,540	151,719	228,705	298,335
New Hampshire	141,885	183,858	214,460	244,161
Vermont	85,425	154,465	217,895	235,981
Massachusetts	387,787	422,845	472,040	523,287
Rhode Island	68,825	69,122	76,931	83,059
Connecticut	237,946	251,002	261,942	275,248
New York	340,120	589,051	959,049	1,372,812
New Jersey	184,139	211,149	245,562	277,575
Pennsylvania	434,373	602,365	810,091	1,049,458
Delaware	59,096	64,273	72,674	72,749
Maryland	319,728	341,548	380,546	407,350
Virginia	691,737	807,554	877,683	938,261
West Virginia ^a	55,873	78,592	105,469	136,808
North Carolina	393,751	478,103	555,500	638,829
South Carolina	249,073	345,591	415,115	502,741
Georgia	82,548	162,686	252,433	340,989
Alabama	—	1,250	9,046	127,901
Mississippi	—	7,600	31,306	75,448
Louisiana	—	—	76,556	153,407
Tennessee	35,691	105,602	261,727	422,823
Kentucky	73,677	220,955	406,511	564,317
Ohio	—	45,365	230,760	581,434
Indiana	—	5,641	24,520	147,178
Illinois	—	—	12,282	55,211
Total	3,938,214	5,300,336	7,198,803	9,525,362

^aWest Virginia did not become a state until 1863; data shown are for that part of Virginia that later became West Virginia.

here in detail. The burgeoning population needed land; but before land was sold it had to be surveyed, and before survey it had to be cleared of Indian title. In many cases the temporal sequence was not followed so neatly; some settlers simply squatted wherever they wished, expecting to secure title later. Many pioneers were well ahead of government officials, creating unrest among the Indians and thereby hastening the process of Indian removal.

This great human tide was choosy simply because it had a good idea of what it wanted and where to find it. The previous late-colonial generation had probed the frontier's edge along its entire length, learning about topography, vegetation, soils, and drainage. Unlike the hordes of immigrants who moved directly from European cities to the treeless prairies some 70 years later, typical settlers of the period between 1790 and 1820 were either American-

born or had spent considerable time along the east coast before setting out. They knew the value of oak and maple forests as soil indicators; they also knew where water and salt could be found. They sought out mill and ford sites quite early, and kept close to navigable lakes and streams, expecting to "float" their products to market. Furthermore, they established towns, churches, schools, roads, stores, even factories as soon as was humanly possible, for they cherished no ideals about an idyllic refuge in the wilderness. They moved west to build new homes, but such homes were to be part of civilized communities in which commerce and industry would be nurtured alongside the arts. This tide was made up from a variety of parent ethnic and national groups, such as the so-called Scotch-Irish, English, Irish, French, German, and the Dutch, but their backgrounds were far less distinct than those of the previous generation because they had become Ameri-

cans. To be sure, tongues and dialects in transformation was under way, but the transformation was being built.

Given such expertise, it is not surprising that the population (Fig. 7.8). New England and New York, detouring Lake Erie was reached along the lakeshore or of Ohio where 3 million were waiting. Farther south from Ft. Pitt (Pittsburgh) one led overland the Seven Ranges; the Ohio River as a highway land bordering the river land could be found on land. The Ohio Company waiting, as did those of Both the Virginia and the had land aplenty. Militarily, and thus both veterans and non-veterans activity was feverish within two decades much although intensified settlement came more slowly.

South of the Ohio, settlement was much less notable. For example, land opened for sale, so settlement on a large scale. Furthermore, the Kentucky and western Virginia sized contiguous farms, to favorable spots, usually adjacent to streams only when valley land slope and soil type were settlers wisely avoided sandy soils. By 1820, when Kentucky almost all of Kentucky large parts of Indiana and was effectively occupied, lying between the Tennessee rivers, which was held by 1818.

Migration into the Great Lakes was dramatic if less continuous than in the Northwest. Emanating from the Ohio sources, population swept westward. The oldest of these nodes (established in 1699) and

cans. To be sure, one encountered alien tongues and dialects in the wilderness, but the transformation was underway, and a new nation was being built.

Given such expertise and goals, we should not be surprised at the changing distribution of population (Fig. 7.8). Settlers poured out of New England and New York along the Mohawk Valley, detouring into favored sites until Lake Erie was reached. The stream then moved along the lakeshore on to the western reserve of Ohio where 3 million acres of vacant land lay waiting. Farther south the route led westward from Ft. Pitt (Pittsburgh). Two routes were open: one led overland directly westward into the Seven Ranges; the other simply used the Ohio River as a highway. By 1800 much of the land bordering the river had been settled, but land could be found only a short distance inland. The Ohio Company Lands (Fig. 7.4) lay waiting, as did those of other surveyed tracts. Both the Virginia and the U.S. Military Reserve had land aplenty. Military warrants were sold openly, and thus both areas were settled by veterans and non-veterans. By 1800 real estate activity was feverish over eastern Ohio, and within two decades much of the land was sold, although intensified settlement and cultivation came more slowly.

South of the Ohio, speculative activity was much less notable. Few large tracts were opened for sale, so settlement was on a smaller scale. Furthermore, the topography of Kentucky and western Virginia discouraged large-sized contiguous farms, restricting settlement to favorable spots, usually the flat valley bottoms adjacent to streams. Uplands were settled only when valley land was taken; even then slope and soil type were important, and most settlers wisely avoided very steep slopes and sandy soils. By 1820, white settlement blanketed almost all of Kentucky and Ohio and large parts of Indiana and Illinois. Tennessee was effectively occupied, except for the lands lying between the Tennessee and Mississippi rivers, which was held by the Chickasaws until 1818.

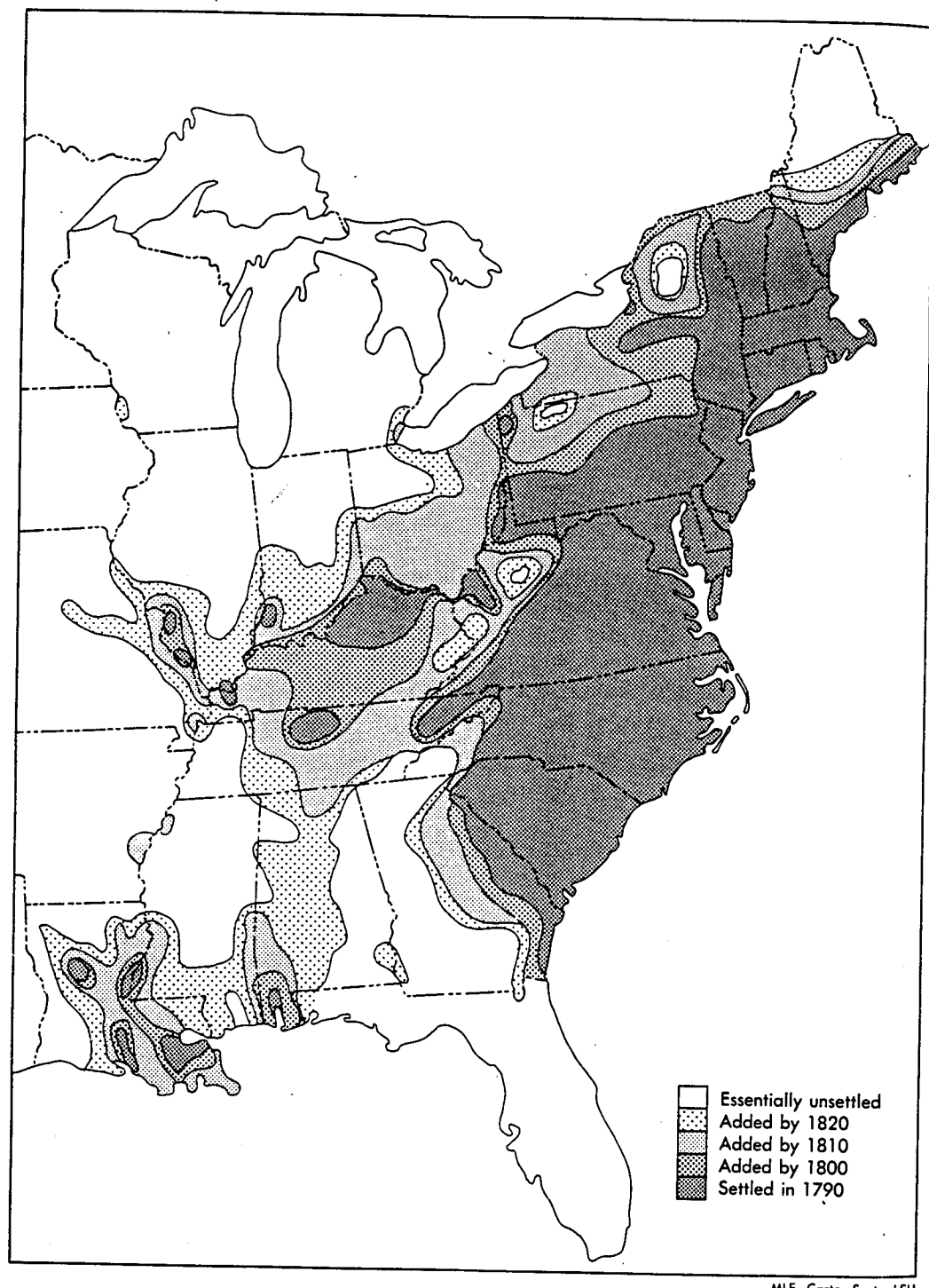
Migration into the Gulf States was just as dramatic if less continuous as that in the Old Northwest. Emanating from four major sources, population swept through the area. The oldest of these nodes were lower Louisiana (established in 1699) and eastern Georgia (es-

tablished in 1733). By the time of the Creek treaty of 1790, settlers were pouring into Georgia from Virginia and the Carolinas. Subsequent land cessions encouraged movement farther west, but after Jackson's defeat of the Indians in 1814, many "leap-frogged" into Alabama. Louisianians were less aggressive than Georgians, but a gradual movement upriver from New Orleans had taken the best drained levee lands, creating a surplus population ready to take up tracts in the Natchez District when it was opened in the first two decades of the 19th century.

The two remaining sources of settlers were at the opposite poles of Alabama. The east Tennessee settlements had expanded downriver into Alabama, while the somewhat older settlement at Mobile moved north. Thus Alabama was opened by a pincer movement from both north and south (Fig. 7.8). By 1820 population in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana had grown to almost 360,000 settlers, enough for all three areas to be admitted as states (Fig. 7.9). The rapid growth was similar to that of the Old Northwest during the same period, although the total number of settlers north of the Ohio River by 1820 totaled more than 780,000 settlers, indicating distinctly different rates of frontier expansion in the new nation's northern and southern thrusts prior to the 1830s.

THE FRONTIER ECONOMY

The westward flood of population following the Revolution resulted from a variety of factors and conditions that were common to most North American frontiers. Differential social and political conditions, land prices, and taxes served to entice or drive people westward. Such motivations were common to all parts of the continent, and thus the westward movement may be seen as a giant wave with smaller ripples occurring where special conditions prevailed. But the movement was much more than a mass migration of people to new lands; it was a transfer of the attitudes, institutions, and occupations that had developed along the eastern seaboard during nearly two centuries of occupation. It also carried along a variety of plants, animals, and material objects with which settlers would transform the western



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Figure 7.8 Expansion of Settlement, 1790-1820



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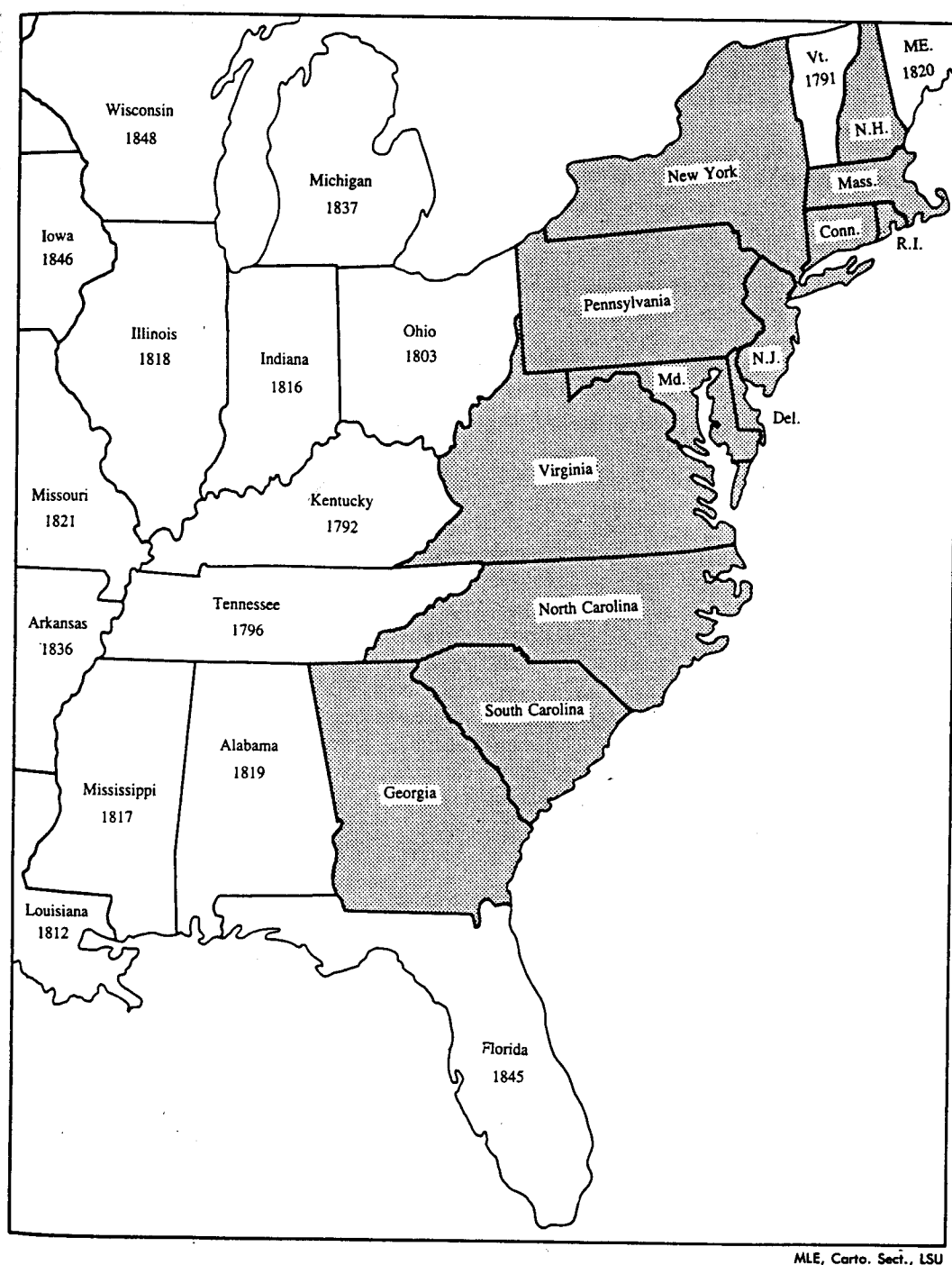


Figure 7.9 The Creation of New States, 1791–1848 (excluding California)

landscape. For the most part, the new settlers represented little more than an expansion of the culture and societies that had developed in the East. This was particularly true in the Old Northwest, where pioneers were engaged in the same kind of agriculture their fathers had developed in the New England and Mid-Atlantic states. Conditions in the Gulf South were somewhat different because, of the region's three cash crops, rice, cotton, and sugarcane, the latter two were relatively new.

Overwhelmingly European in origin but tempered by the American experience, the American Culture (if that be the correct phrase) had itself matured to a state in which broader regional differences were discernible, and nowhere were they greater than in the patterns of rural economy. Even by 1790 the South had developed a strong dependence on certain crops, notably tobacco, rice, indigo, and cotton, while farther north a more diversified agriculture based on grains and livestock was the rule. Even this distinction is oversimplified, because most agriculturalists achieved a high level of subsistence by keeping a number of livestock and growing a variety of food crops. It is tempting to refer to the southern specialty crops as "cash" crops, but such a characterization obscures the fact that many crops and animals served as "cash" items throughout the new nation. Thus wheat was as much of a cash crop in parts of New York and Ohio as tobacco was a cash crop in Virginia and Kentucky. As might be expected, such regional diversity was reflected later in the developing areas of the West, for migration was decidedly zonal. The upper Midwest was settled largely by New Englanders and upstate New Yorkers; the Gulf Plains by Georgians, Virginians, and Carolinians; and the central Midwest became the domain of migrants from the Mid-Atlantic states. The Ohio Valley, including all of Kentucky, much of Tennessee, and southern Ohio and Indiana, received a variety of settlers, principally from Virginia but many also from Maryland, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. Obviously, such broad generalizations are not without exceptions, but they serve to delineate the regional patterns of rural economy and culture established west of the Appalachian divide.

The very earliest agriculture focused on survival. Food for family and stock had highest priority, but subsistence farming soon devel-

oped a commercial element. Corn, wheat, and livestock were sold to incoming settlers, and within a few years both eastern and foreign markets were eyed. Transportation problems in such an isolated area seemed insurmountable at first, but enterprising westerners found ways of marketing goods that were unthinkable a generation earlier. High-value goods could be hauled out by wagon, but the relatively bulky goods, such as corn, cotton, meat, and wheat, were floated downriver to New Orleans. Livestock, particularly cattle but also horses, mules, and hogs, were driven overland, a practice that continued for half a century or more. Eventually, the Great Lakes-Erie Canal waterway greatly eased the difficulties for the Old Northwest, but throughout the antebellum period the relative isolation of western farmers remained a nagging problem.

In the South many conditions were similar, but the production system and crop emphasis were different. Virginia and North Carolina had long enjoyed prosperity associated with the world market for tobacco, but farther south the emphasis had been on indigo, rice, and was now turning to cotton. Cotton, grown in small quantities along the South Carolina-Georgia coast, came to be a preferred raw material for light textiles. This sea-island variety commanded premium prices but was limited to favored coastal locations. A hardier variety, upland or green-seeded cotton, was more widely grown but production was hampered by the difficulty of separating lint from seed, a problem solved by the development of the mechanical cotton gin in the early 1790s. Stimulated by this innovation and by the seemingly limitless world market for the new fiber (especially in industrial Britain), cotton producers swept across the Gulf South. Southern producers were in a somewhat better position than those in the Old Northwest because of the orientation of major rivers. Both Mobile and New Orleans served huge hinterlands, so that cotton moved easily into the ocean trade, where the major disadvantage was the long voyage necessary to reach both eastern American and European ports. It is a remarkable testimony to the transportation technology of the time that cotton growers in northern Alabama and the Nashville Basin sent their goods on a journey of more than 1,500 miles to New Orleans, where it then had to travel some 5,000 miles more to reach Liverpool. It is small won-

der that eastern direct route from interior.

Although it was agricultural specialization can identify incipient the West. Cotton western South with productions: the and adjacent Nashville and the lower Mississippi and southwestern the process of sugarcane the 1790s encouraged major waterways across sugar and cotton supplementing the and livestock in Louisiana remained largely the 31st parallel to the growing season of the north in Tennessee practices mirrored Carolina, a diverse and grains, supplemented tobacco and hemp the Nashville area best conditions, population and economy

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der that eastern entrepreneurs dreamed of a direct route from the eastern cities into the interior.

Although it would be misleading to talk of agricultural specialty regions before 1820, we can identify incipient nodes of production in the West. Cotton was the *raison d'être* of the western South with three areas showing early productions: the Tennessee Valley of Alabama and adjacent Nashville Basin, central Alabama, and the lower Mississippi valley in Louisiana and southwestern Mississippi. Development of the process of sugar granulation in Louisiana in the 1790s encouraged its production along major waterways adjacent to New Orleans. Both sugar and cotton production expanded rapidly, supplementing the existing culture of indigo and livestock in Louisiana, although sugarcane remained largely limited to the area south of the 31st parallel because of its need for a long growing season of more than 220 days. Farther north in Tennessee and Kentucky, agricultural practices mirrored those of Virginia and North Carolina, a diversified production of livestock and grains, supplemented by the culture of tobacco and hemp in favored locations. Both the Nashville and Bluegrass basins offered the best conditions, and both became centers of population and economic activity. Both wheat

and corn were widely grown, the latter providing feed for livestock and the raw material for whiskey.

The Old Northwest developed along several lines. The southern part concentrated on the production of corn and hogs, and pork-packing became a major industry. Dairying became a notable feature of the Western Reserve in northeastern Ohio. Corn and wheat were widely grown, the former being a staple for both man and beast, while the latter found its way to markets in Canada and New Orleans. Livestock were kept by virtually all farmers, reflecting the practices of those prevalent a generation earlier in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. Mule breeding emerged in Ohio in response to the demand for draft stock, and sheep were quite numerous in the eastern hill country. By the end of the second decade of the 19th century the major outlines of the western economy had already developed. No one could talk seriously about a Cotton Belt or a Corn Belt at that time, but the ingredients necessary for their development were in place. In the following decades farm production increased dramatically as new outlets and markets developed, uniting the three great resource regions—Northeast, Middle West, and South—into a national system.

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